

Annual Report on the Measurement of Student Learning Outcomes For Ongoing Program Improvement

College of Fine Arts
Margaret Merrion, Dean
August 1, 2009

1. *Based on the evidence provided by the departments/units, evaluate unit-by-unit the implementation and use of assessment data.*

DEPARTMENT OF DANCE

The department appears to be reflecting on data and making decisions informed by the data. As evidence the department made the following curricular changes in 2008-09:

- The unit aligned its prerequisites for the dance history sequence to make it easier for students to progress through the program.
- Based on assessment data and faculty concerns, the department revised the technique component of the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) program to ensure continuity of technique training by requiring at least two technique courses per semester in the BFA Dance major be taken for credit. More specifically, the department changed DANC 121- Roots of Jazz from a requirement to a technique elective. For the Bachelor of Arts (BA) program the department revised requirements to ensure continuity of training by requiring that at least one technique course per semester in the BA Dance major is taken for credit.

FROSTIC SCHOOL OF ART

The school appears to be reflecting on data and making decisions informed by the data. While current assessment data has not yet been entered into TracDat and based upon the data available, gradual improvement is evident as more faculty are engaged in collecting data and evaluating student learning. Five outcomes are used to evaluate all studio-based degrees and data collected indicated that the school is succeeding in all 5 criteria.

The school has made several changes to the curricula over the past few years based on assessment data: 1) the development of a capstone course for studio majors that focuses on professional preparation after graduation, 2) assessment of incoming transfer students that some students may have revealed that some students are prepared to move directly into upper division coursework, and 3) a BFA in art education was developed which will more adequately prepare the students in teaching theory, methods, and experience.

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

The school appears to be reflecting on data and making decisions informed by the data.

- The music performance areas were assessed for their ability to prepare students to enter into their major field of study employing a specific gateway, called “the sophomore hearing,” a comprehensive evaluation administered at the end of the music student’s fourth semester. Successfully passing this “hearing” allows the student to fully enter into the performance major.
- Students must demonstrate performance competency on their respective instruments and must understand the stylistic components of various genres of music. The school reviews the

data and compares the area's criterion and expectations with the actual outcomes. To date, these assessment outcomes meet or exceed the unit's standards. In the specific case of the performance evaluations previously mentioned, the school has an 85% or better outcome for students passing the "hearing" on the first attempt.

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

The department appears to be reflecting on data and making excellent decisions informed by the data. The department examined more than 45 specific learning outcomes sometimes applying as many as six different assessment tools to measure a single outcome. The entire faculty and teaching staff participated in this process, convening to discuss the results and reporting the findings in TracDat by the end of Spring 2009.

The department notes an increase in the number of outcomes being effectively met with no remedies required. The department also designed and proposed three new degree programs, transitioning the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees to Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degrees in Performance, Theatre Design and Technical Production, and Stage Management. Several elements of these new curricula were created in response to the assessment data gathered over the last several years. In addition, some methodologies the department planned to pursue to ensure learning outcomes have been curtailed due to budgetary restrictions.

Following are observations for each program:

Music Theater Performance Program

- Students in the Music Theatre Performance (MTP) program are meeting most of the current guidelines and expectations of the program. Previously problematic areas in Music Theory, Aural Comprehension and Tech Level Dance have been greatly improved due to changes in curriculum, course content, and student focus. Many issues that arose from last year's assessment have been addressed successfully and over 90% of the students are proceeding well within the program.
- Improvement is evidenced by the fact that fewer than 10% of MTP students were required to repeat Music 1600 to achieve the passing grade of "C." In addition, the Aural Comprehension portion of the major, although primarily geared toward the classical music student and requiring proficiency in areas not compulsory for the study of musical theatre repertoire, has undergone changes to the course content and testing procedures. As a direct result the success rate of MTP students in the Aural Comprehension classes has greatly improved to 95%.
- The Department of Dance, in an effort to make the technical level classes more challenging for Dance majors, had required many MTP students to repeat beginning level jazz classes until their technical proficiency reached the level of dance majors. This was problematic as most dance majors have a significantly advanced level of technical proficiency when entering the university. As a remedy the departments were able to include an Advanced Beginning Level of dance that proved enormously helpful.
- The department reviewed the MTP curriculum and expanded the list of courses for which an MTP student may receive credit in dance. As a result MTP students have improved their ability to fulfill the requirements of the program and their skills in dance.
- The greatest single remaining concern regarding program outcomes is the dance "Quick Up" requirement which involves the students' ability to learn and execute dance combinations quickly and well. It directly impacts the ability to compete in professional auditions. In the coming year the department will provide further opportunities for students to develop these skills by emphasizing this skill in existing courses.
- Providing ample performance opportunities continues to be a concern. The department is

making significant headway with a more active musical production program. Students are performing in these productions and cabarets. Students also have an opportunity to perform in classes that focus on scene study and staged readings. In addition, the department is actively encouraging directing students to work on musical theatre repertoire in classes and for the student directed “Footlight” productions.

Performance Program

- Overall the faculty is enormously pleased with the work of the students. It is important to note that the new voice and movement professor had a significant impact upon the students’ progress. Many students commented positively—and enthusiastically—on the effectiveness of her contributions and the synchronicity of her work with other classes.
- The faculty noted improved directing in the “Footlights” series projects and the required project proposals. Both improvements resulted from remedies devised in response to concerns revealed in assessment. The faculty did note the need for additional mentoring to ensure consistent outcomes in directing. Since mentoring is unpaid faculty overload it is difficult to achieve the requisite improvement in this area.
- The students have been positively influenced by the variety of styles of productions, texts, and guest artists. The faculty are particularly pleased with the sense that both process and discipline are being successfully communicated throughout the students’ four years. Areas for future improvement include locating effective and appropriate audition material and properly preparing students for auditions. The faculty is addressing this within existing classes through increased focus and attention.

Design and Technical Theatre Program

All area faculty and staff participated in the assessment of ten outcomes for majors using the numerous methods identified in the assessment plan (fourth and sixth semester reviews, ACTF and U/RTA portfolio screenings, etc.). The faculty and staff continue to identify areas for improvement and these issues have been addressed in the BFA program proposed for implementation in Fall Semester 2010, including:

- The need for a required course in drawing and painting for majors (similar to the elective offered by Gwen Nagle under the aegis of THEA 4000, which resulted in dramatic improvements in our students’ color rendering skills). This is the area’s highest curricular priority.
- Advancement in student drafting skills through a revision of the syllabus of THEA 1310 pending approval of a required course in drawing and painting for all majors (see above).
- Improvement of student technical production skills through a revision of THEA 2200 as a repeatable course team-taught by existing technical production staff.

In addition, the decision to offer THEA 4320 - Computer Aided Drafting and Design (CADD) in Fall 2008 as a second-year course (as opposed to a fourth year course) proved extremely effective. The fourth semester reviews evidenced the efficacy of earlier introduction to CADD skills. The faculty and staff recommend the continuation of this practice until the new sequence becomes “official” within the proposed BFA.

Stage Management Program

The entire area faculty and staff participated in the assessment of seven outcomes for the Stage Management majors using the numerous methods identified in the assessment plan (fourth and sixth semester reviews, ACTF and U/RTA portfolio screenings, etc.). The faculty and staff continue to identify the same area for improvement as in previous years: the inconsistency among

student stage managers due to curricular irregularities and the necessity of implementing the Stage Management II capstone course. This issue has been addressed in the proposed BFA in Stage Management.

2. *Based on your evaluation of the departments/units, identify the specific steps the individual departments/units and the college will take to address:*

- i. Full implementation of assessment plans*

DEPARTMENT OF DANCE

The department has taken significant steps in the direction of full implementation. The assessment committee substantially revised the department's assessment plan in 2008-09. (The complete plan is available on TracDat.) A summary of the changes implemented includes:

- A shift in the data collection calendar away from a fiscal year calendar. This will enable faculty to examine a full year of data during the following Spring semester and take actions rather than reviewing data at the start of the school year and have difficulty meeting the October 1 curriculum change deadline. Hence, data for this year's report includes only data collected from January to June 2009. Next year, the report and action plan will look at a data from the calendar year 2009.
- A review and revision of goals, outcomes, methods and benchmarks to more effectively and efficiently align with the assessment process and ensure that methods align with one another.
- Research and implementation of electronic means of data collection via web-based Survey Monkey.

In addition the assessment committee met with Karen Stokes in May 2009 to begin the process of implementing iWebfolio as the repository for student portfolios used in the assessment process. Still to be resolved are issues of including video footage on iWebfolio and specific details about portfolio content. These will be addressed during 2009-10 with projected implementation of the portfolio requirement with students entering in Fall 2010 via DANC 1000 - Freshman Performance.

FROSTIC SCHOOL OF ART

While the school still needs to develop a process to more successfully evaluate the BA degree—and plans to do so in 2009-10—the current assessment plan is otherwise fully implemented.

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

The Assessment Committee will review outcomes. Data which falls below expectations of the area's criterion will be brought forth to the director of the school. The director will give charge to the specific area for review and implementation of better practices to address deficiencies.

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

The assessment plan initially adopted continues to be effective. However, the department did conduct a full review of the plan. During Summer I 2009 four faculty members examined both established learning outcomes and the tools of assessment. Their specific charge was to:

- Evaluate the relevance of currently defined learning outcomes with respect to the department's current strategic academic planning, recommending maintenance, revision, or replacement.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current assessment tools, recommending possible revisions or replacements. Samples of these recommendations are discussed below in section 2. ii.

The recommendations of these faculty members will be presented to the whole faculty for consideration in Fall 2009 with an expectation of revising the assessment plan prior to its use in Spring 2010.

ii. Use of assessment data to improve programs

DEPARTMENT OF DANCE

The Assessment Impact by Goals report on TracDat details benchmark criteria met or not met at this time. The full report will be completed in December 2009 and analyzed during Spring 2010 based on the new calendar implemented with the revised assessment plan. Data is also affected by the revision of survey instruments that did not match the new assessment plan. These will align in the next administration of the instruments. Faculty will meet in a retreat prior to the academic year to begin addressing issues raised in the current assessment report. This discussion will continue through Spring 2010 when a full year of data will be available.

Exiting senior survey comments provided several suggestions for improvement:

- Examine and increase the rigor of the sophomore review process.
- Align a student's career goals in the BA program with the capstone project and final personal statements, especially for students not seeking a career in performance and/or choreography.
- Examine more opportunities for cross-unit interdisciplinary work.
- Review and enhance the relevance and integration of music training in the program.
- Examine how more performance opportunities may be afforded to a greater percentage of the student body.

As well as exceeding all benchmarks related to alumni, an alumni survey conducted in January 2009 yielded valuable information for curricular assessment, including the following recommendations and observations that faculty will consider during the 2009-2010 academic year:

- Improving the preparation for the audition process, particularly in the commercial area and strengthening the writing components of the curriculum.
- Several alumni noted the importance of the nurturing attitude of faculty accompanied by high standards.
- In addition to the expected importance of technique courses, several alumni noted that pedagogy, history, choreography, production, management and dance science courses—as well as the variety of performance opportunities—had assisted with their careers and preparation for graduate study.

The department continues to be selective, auditioning 124 students during 2008-09 year for approximately 25 places for new students, and the dance minor is popular with a 12 to 18 month wait to declare the minor. The relative technique weakness observed within the incoming class for 2009 is indicated by the missed benchmarks and faculty will need to address this issue in the coming year.

Student performance continues to be recognized, earning top awards this year at the Michigan Choreographers' Competition and the regional American College Dance Festival (*nothing was left but white fragments*, choreographed by faculty member Carolyn Pavlik and performed by seniors Lonnie Poupard, Jr. and Tercell Waters). In 2009 to date, dance faculty have presented at the National Dance Education Organization Conference, the Society of Dance History Scholars, and have been invited to teach regionally. Students performed in a video dance choreographed by alumna Erin Lamont which was among 10 dances selected as a finalist in the national Capezio

A.C.E. competition. Other alumni accomplishments can be found in the alumni e-newsletter on the Department of Dance's web site: www.wmich.edu/dance.

FROSTIC SCHOOL OF ART

The school has made changes to its curricula over the past four years to in response to assessment data and in 2009-10 will evaluate the baccalaureate writing requirement, possibly placing the responsibility for the requirement within the purview of the art historians. The school will also place assessment materials on its new website so that faculty have easy access to the materials and will conduct a workshop during a faculty meeting to set standards for portfolio review.

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Assessment data will be reviewed comprehensively over a cycle of several years. Emerging patterns that may indicate the need to overhaul curriculum will be discussed, re-designed, and implemented by the unit.

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

Overall, the department faculty finds the assessment plan to be largely relevant and effective. While no faculty have recommended significant changes, the Director of Music Theatre Performance has recommended that the process be streamlined with several outcomes being combined. This would enable a clearer perspective on the interdisciplinary nature of study and the interdependence of its components. He also recommends the addition of one additional outcome and greater emphasis on evaluation of performance.

The Director of the Stage Management Program has recommended revising language in our outcomes to reflect the new guidelines created by our accrediting organizations. She has also recommended adding new outcomes that also address the new National Association of Schools of Theatre priorities. This is a young program and, as the number of the students grows and their sophistication develops, the department can raise the bar on expectations also reflected in a few redesigned outcomes.

Within the Performance Program recommendations focus on the addition of a few new assessment tools. The identified outcomes remain the same but in certain areas, the faculty lack the tools to sufficiently assess and document assessment outcomes. Additionally, it is recommended that a few of the outcomes be combined or assigned different, existing assessment tools.

The Director of Design and Technical Production Program finds the defined outcomes relevant. However, he has recommended a revision in the identified assessment tools for certain outcomes. He has also recommended discussion regarding assessment of students' progress in courses outside the department, especially relevant, as the new BFA program will enable our students to take electives in many other areas. Finally, he has recommended a revision of the fourth and six semester reviews—one of the most critical assessment tools—to clarify expectations at the different levels of students' progress.

These findings will be brought to the entire faculty in the fall of 2009. A revised assessment plan will be put into use in the spring of 2010.

- 3. Based on your evaluation of the departments' use of assessment data to improve programs, what measures will the*

college take in Academic Year 2009-2010 to foster a culture of assessment?

- In 2008-09 the college provided funding for faculty in two of the four units to refine assessment processes. Those projects were completed as promised and are ready for implementation. The four units do not have any equivalent projects slated for 2009-10, but the college will continue to seek proposals.
- The college has learned that, by and large, the directors and chairs ensure that faculty are active in assessment and attentive to the outcomes revealed in the collected data. While activity levels, actions, and outcomes may vary from year to year, the directors and chairs can generally be trusted to stimulate discussion within their faculty at large, with assessment committees, with curriculum committees, and with advisory councils.
- The college encourages faculty to take advantage of opportunities offered by WMU for sharing best practices.
- The Associate Dean will meet with the assessment committee in each unit and convene a meeting of the unit-level committee chair's to collect and share ideas about successful practices.